



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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CREW OF SHIP CARRYING MORE THAN 2 TONS OF COCAINE SENTENCED TO 113 YEARS IN PRISON

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico—U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today announced that the nine-member crew of a ship carrying more than two tons of cocaine were sentenced here Monday to a collective sentence of 113 years in prison.

The M/V Sea Atlantic, sailing under the Bolivian flag at approximately 150 nautical miles off the coast of Aruba, raised the interest of law enforcement organizations operating as part of Operation Caribbean Corridor. After a successful cooperation between the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the international counter drug organization Joint Inter Agency Task Force South, the Royal Netherlands Navy, and the Coast Guard for the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, more than 68 bales of cocaine were found in a hidden compartment on board the ship.

In the early morning of Aug. 27, 2005, the USCG Law Enforcement Detachment (permanently stationed onboard the Royal Netherlands Navy Ship HRMS Van Amstal) boarded the motor vessel Sea Atlantic, assisted by a Royal Netherlands Navy Maritime Security Team. Later that morning, they found 68 bales (approximately 4,488 pounds) of a powdery substance that tested positive for cocaine during a field test.

The crew of the M/V Sea Atlantic was arrested and the ship was escorted to Puerto Rico by the USCG Cutter Vigorous.

On Monday, Jan. 30, 2006, federal judge Jose Fuste sentenced Venezuelan nationals Alicides Rodriguez-Duran, 38, captain of the ship and Reinaldo Jose Cabello, 42, first mate, to 24 and 19 years in prison respectively. The other seven crew members Carlos Julio Almonte, 59, citizen of the Dominican Republic; Gandaogo Minoungou, 42, citizen of Burkina Faso; Nii Klaku Okley, 39, citizen of Ghana; Ruberts Gonzalez Valero, 29, citizen of Venezuela; Ronald Jose Morelis, 32, citizen of Venezuela; Julio Cessar de la Rosa, 34, citizen of the Dominican Republic; and Alberto Javier Padilla, citizen of Mexico were each sentenced to 10 years in prison.

“ICE and the other federal agencies in Operation Caribbean Corridor--DEA, FBI and the U.S. Coast Guard--are working together, efficiently and intelligently to stop the transshipment of

drugs and other contraband in the Caribbean Basin,” said Lydia St. John-Mellado, special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in Puerto Rico. “ICE will continue using all its resources to fight and win the war against drugs in this part of the world.”

"U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachments have a proud and successful history of intercepting contraband with the Dutch navy in the Caribbean,” said Captain James Tunstall, Commander of the USCG Sector in San Juan. “With the aggressive work of ICE, DEA and the FBI in Operation Caribbean Corridor, our collective resources are maximized as we work together to keep drugs off the streets."

The crew of the Sea Atlantic is in federal custody at the metropolitan detention center in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico.

#ICE#

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.